



*Discipline and Its Discontents:
A Foucauldian Reading of The Giver*

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"Honor," he said firmly. "I have great honor. So will you. But you will find that that is not the same as power."

(Lowry, *The Giver* 84)

The opening scene of Lois Lowry's Newbery Award-winning novel *The Giver* announces a thematic concern with social discipline. In this scene Jonas, the adolescent protagonist, remembers a time when he was afraid:

Frightened was the way he had felt a year ago when an unidentified aircraft had overflown the community twice. . . . At first, he had been only fascinated. He had never seen aircraft so close, for it was against the rules for Pilots to fly over the community. . . . Then all of the citizens had been ordered to go into the nearest building and stay there. . . . He had been frightened then. (1-2)

Soon a voice comes over the loudspeaker, assuring everyone that there is nothing to worry about, that a Pilot-in-Training had simply become lost and made a wrong turn. Then the voice adds ominously, "Needless to say, he will be released" (2). Jonas reflects grimly on the pilot's fate, knowing that release represents "a final decision, a terrible punishment, an overwhelming statement of failure" (2). While such a fate seems inappropriately harsh, the reader soon learns that this is a rigid, unforgiving community based on an elaborate system of discipline and punishment, a community that has sacrificed free will, diversity, and individualism in the name of security and sameness.

However, these mechanisms of control, while chillingly effective, are not absolute. As the novel progresses, Jonas experiences a growing awareness of the terrible sacrifices his community has made, and eventually he decides to escape. His act of resistance, and the famously ambiguous ending of the novel, question the efficacy of these mechanisms of control while at the same time refusing to provide a comfortable resolution. In her book *Disturbing the Universe: Power and Repres-*

sion in *Adolescent Literature*, Roberta Seelinger Trites explains, "Power is a force that operates within the subject and upon the subject in adolescent literature; teenagers are repressed as well as liberated by their own power and by the power of the social forces that surround them . . ." (7). *The Giver* depicts the conflict between the power of the individual and the power structures of a totalitarian society and suggests that radical social change may be possible through courageous acts of resistance. In one sense Lowry's novel, much like its protagonist who ultimately rejects his assigned role, eschews the role of the typical adolescent novel, which is to "depict how potentially out-of-control adolescents can learn to exist within institutional structures" (Trites 7). The novel contradicts this notion, suggesting instead that Jonas should be admired precisely *because* he resists the institutional structures of his community. In another sense, by portraying the power structures of a dystopian society, a society that appears as "other" to adolescent readers, the novel suggests that our society is preferable to the kind of totalitarian community in which Jonas lives but also serves as an implicit warning about what our society could become. The novel thus serves to reintegrate readers into the power structures of our own society while at the same time empowering them as potential agents of positive social change.

Lowry's novel can be seen as a narrative embodiment of the social philosophy of Michel Foucault, and as such it offers adolescent readers a lesson in how power relations work within any society, including our own. Using a Foucauldian framework informed by more recent feminist theory, I propose to examine the power structures depicted in the novel, the role the protagonist plays in resisting those structures, and the social implications of the ambiguous ending. Throughout my analysis, I will contextualize Lowry's work by referencing, where appropriate, two other famous dystopian novels to which Lowry's novel is clearly indebted: Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) and George Orwell's *1984* (1949).

Discipline

In contrast to the horrific totalitarian state described in *1984*, the community of *The Giver*, like the society in *Brave New World*, appears at first to be more ambiguous—one critic has even described it as "seductive" (Levy 52). The citizens seem to lead contented, well-ordered, secure lives. In one sense the society depicted in *The Giver* seems to

represent "an extended, idealized childhood" with no pain and no unpleasantness (Lehman and Crook 71). But in another sense childhood seems impossible in this society, for it has been "sacrificed to the order and sameness the community demand[s]" (Gross 113). As Jonas comes to realize, this "orderly, disciplined life" is also a "life without color, pain, or past" (Lowry, *The Giver* 165). The valorization of sameness in this community echoes a similar emphasis in the society of *Brave New World*, where sameness is genetically engineered and "happiness" is maintained through regular ingestion of the drug *soma*.

Beneath the surface of orderliness and sameness lies an extensive network of social discipline. According to Foucault, in order for the individual to be transformed into a viable economic force, s/he must be regulated, disciplined, and subjected (*Discipline and Punish* 138). It is in the production of "docile bodies" that such a society can continue to function, via its schools, its military, and its workforce (135–69 *passim*). The society depicted in *The Giver* produces docile bodies through a variety of disciplinary techniques based on the control of individual roles. In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of The Prison*, Foucault describes four basic techniques of discipline, all of which are exemplified in Lowry's novel and, to varying degrees, in the other dystopian novels as well.

One technique is the spatial distribution of individuals (Foucault, *Discipline* 141–49). In *The Giver*, the members of the community are distributed spatially according to their stage of life, with newborn children living together at the Nurturing Center, children and adults living together in families, older adults living with childless couples, and the oldest adults living together in the House of the Old. As in most industrialized societies, people are also distributed according to their function in society. Children go to school, while adults work at places specific to their particular jobs.

A second technique of discipline involves the control of activities for the purpose of encouraging those activities that are useful to society and discouraging those that are considered counterproductive (Foucault, *Discipline* 149–56). In the society depicted in Lowry's novel, activities are regimented through a series of preassigned and rigidly defined roles. Children's lives are tightly regulated, with little time provided for play and relaxation. Jonas enjoys his volunteer work because it is rare for him to have a choice about how he spends his time. In 1984, Party members' lives are also highly controlled, with little time allowed for individual reflection. The expectation is that people

should be either working at their jobs or participating in a community activity.

One of the great challenges of maintaining social discipline is the regulation of sexual desire, for such desire is difficult to subordinate to the larger concerns of the community. In 1984, sexual intercourse is strongly discouraged and is tolerated only for the purpose of procreation. An entirely different approach is taken by the society of *Brave New World*. Members of this society are encouraged to have sex freely and indiscriminately. The emphasis, however, is solely on achieving pleasure without forming any kind of emotional attachment, for in this society it is love, not sex, that represents a threat to the stability of the community. Procreation is accomplished through an elaborate and impersonal assembly-line method of in vitro fertilization and gestation. In Lowry's novel sexual "stirrings," in both adolescents and adults, are suppressed through daily medication. Procreation is accomplished through the use of Birthmothers, whom, it would appear, are impregnated through artificial insemination. Birthmothers are strictly reproductive machines; they never even get to see the children they give birth to, and after three years and three births, they spend the rest of their adult lives performing physical labor until they are too old to work.

A third technique of discipline is the organization of training into discrete segments (Foucault, *Discipline* 156–62). In *Brave New World*, individuals are carefully conditioned as they grow up so that they will be properly prepared to assume their assigned roles in life and, moreover, will "like their inescapable social destiny" (16). The community depicted in *The Giver*, much like our own society, divides training into highly structured stages based largely on age. Each stage involves specific kinds of training and carefully planned milestones. At the age of three, children are trained in the acquisition of language skills and the precise use of language; at nine, they are presented with bicycles; and at twelve they begin formal training for their assigned role in life.

A fourth technique of discipline is the coordination of all parts (Foucault, *Discipline* 162–69) such that the interests of the individual are subordinated to the good of the community. In 1984 the concept of "individualism and eccentricity"—the Newspeak term is "ownlife" (72)—is considered highly dangerous. Troublesome individuals, those who assert too much individuality, are "vaporized" and then eradicated from the public record. In the community of Lowry's novel,

where it is considered highly impolite to talk about another's differences, individuality is essentially elided. Mirrors are rare in this community, for there is "no real need of them" (21) in a society that places so little emphasis on the identity of the individual. If an individual does not fit in and contribute to the greater good of the community, then that person is "released"—executed by lethal injection.

The stability of any highly disciplined society with rigidly defined roles depends on a careful monitoring of all individuals. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault describes the Panopticon, a building designed by Jeremy Bentham to allow for the relatively easy observance of inmates, whether they be prisoners, patients, or pupils. The building consists of a ring of cells facing onto a central tower, from which a supervisor can constantly observe the individuals in each cell (200). Foucault explains that the effect of the Panopticon was "to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power" (201). This edifice serves as an apt metaphor for the workings of surveillance in any society.

In *The Giver* surveillance is evident in several ways. One manifestation is the omnipresent loudspeakers over which the members of the community are given instructions and admonishments. Apparently, these loudspeakers also allow centralized monitoring of activities, perhaps through hidden cameras as well as microphones. Jonas recalls a time when he took an apple from the Recreation Area and an announcement came over the speaker that evening: "SNACKS ARE TO BE EATEN, NOT HOARDED" (23). Like the ubiquitous telescreens in *1984* that proclaim Big Brother's pervasive presence, all homes and public places in Jonas's community have speakers that are always turned on. Only the Receiver of Memory has a speaker with an "off" switch, just as in *1984* only Inner Party members have telescreens that can be switched off.

Another method of surveillance can be seen in how carefully the members of the community watch one another. Even children are on the lookout for rule violations. Lily, Jonas's little sister, complains at the dinner table one evening because a group of children visiting her school "didn't obey the rules at all" (5). Jonas's classmate Pierre exemplifies this tendency in an exaggerated way: he is always saying things like, "Have you checked the rules?" and "I'm not sure that's within the rules" (51). This kind of communal surveillance is even more pernicious in *1984*, where the Party encourages children to join groups known collectively as the Spies and to inform on their parents and neighbors.

Perhaps the most effective means of surveillance at work in the community in Lowry's novel is the self-monitoring that has been instilled in people. Jonas, for instance, does not talk to his friend Asher about the fact that Asher takes pills to suppress his sexual urges, nor does he compliment his friend Benjamin on his impressive accomplishments, because doing so would make both boys self-conscious; making other people self-conscious is prohibited. Jonas thinks, "Better to steer clear of an occasion governed by a rule which would be so easy to break" (27).

Along with various methods of surveillance, confession is also used in this community as a way of monitoring thoughts and actions. In *The History of Sexuality, Volume One*, Foucault describes the extent to which confession has come to permeate modern society. One always confesses within a power relationship, i.e., one confesses to an "authority who requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console, and reconcile" (62). Confession may take a variety of forms, including "interrogations, interviews, conversations, consultations, or even autobiographical narratives" (McHoul and Grace 80). Foucault also acknowledges confession's historical association with torture (Bartkowski 47). In 1984 the protagonist, Winston Smith, confesses "for the future, for the unborn" (6) by writing in his journal. He also worries about confessing involuntarily by talking in his sleep. Later, under torture, he confesses to a variety of "crimes."

In the community depicted in *The Giver*, confession takes three main forms. One is the apology. People are quick to apologize to one another for perceived infractions of the rules. A child who appears a few minutes late to school is obliged to apologize to the teacher and the class. Another means of confession is in the nightly discussion of feelings around the dinner table. On one night, for instance, Jonas confesses that he is feeling apprehensive about the upcoming Ceremony of Twelve, during which he will receive his life's work assignment. A third means of confession in this community is dream-telling, wherein each member of the family describes his or her dreams from the previous night. This ritual helps to eradicate potentially dangerous subconscious feelings by bringing them to light and thus neutralizing them (Walters 36). Jonas tells of a dream in which he felt strange but pleasurable yearnings for his friend Fiona. Through the telling of his dream, Jonas alerts his parents to the fact that it is time for him to start taking the pills that suppress sexual "stirrings." Confession in this case facilitates the administration of societal control.

Control is also accomplished through the regulation of knowledge, or discourse. Foucault's concept of the "archive" serves to illuminate society's relationship to knowledge and the collective memory. In using the term "archive," Foucault means "the set of rules which at a given period and for a given society defined: 1) the limits and the forms of *expressibility* . . . 2) the limits and the forms of *conservation* . . . 3) the limits and the forms of *memory* . . . 4) the limits and the forms of *reactivation*" ("Politics and the Study of Discourse" 14–15). Foucault is concerned, not with how something is said, but with "what can be said," specifically with "*whatever* constrains—but also enables—writing, speaking and thinking within . . . specific historical limits" (McHoul and Grace 31). The communities in *Brave New World*, 1984, and *The Giver* are permeated by multiple discourses that intersect and ultimately create a web of power relations that determine what can be thought or said in each community.

In order to control discourse, a society must regulate language itself. In 1984 the official language, Newspeak, controls what people may think by controlling the symbolic expression of ideas. One of Winston's coworkers states the purpose of Newspeak succinctly: "to narrow the range of thought," ultimately to "make thoughtcrime literally impossible, because there will be no words in which to express it" (46). The community in *The Giver* strictly enforces the precise use of language. When three-year-old Asher asks for a "smack" instead of a "snack," he is struck with the discipline wand (55). When Jonas asks his parents if they love him, they respond with incredulity. His mother denigrates the word "love" as being "a very generalized word, so meaningless that it's become almost obsolete" (127). She adds: "[O]ur community can't function smoothly if people don't use precise language" (127).

These communities are constrained not only by the rules of their language but also by the control that is exerted over various forms of discourse. In 1984 history is constantly rewritten by the Ministry of Truth to reflect the prevailing views of the present. Winston doubts that any book published before 1960 has survived the book purges. In *Brave New World* all forms of public discourse are controlled by the various Bureaux of Propaganda (significantly housed in the same building as the College of Emotional Engineering). Only very powerful people, like the Controller Mustapha Mond, possess books like the Bible, Thomas Á Kempis's *The Imitation of Christ*, and William James's *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (230–31). In *The Giver* dis-

courses of the past apparently are preserved but are unavailable to most citizens of the community. Knowledge of the past is relegated to the Receiver of Memory, who, in actuality, is rarely consulted. When Jonas first visits the Receiver of Memory, he is astonished by the number of books on the shelves, a dramatic contrast to the few books in most houses. Literature, philosophy, and history are apparently unavailable to most people. As a result, this community is caught in an eternal present, which serves to reinforce the strict power structures by making knowledge of a different time and a different kind of society inaccessible.

Punishment

A highly disciplined society depends on an effective means of enforcing rules by punishing those who break the rules—by creating, in effect, a “culture of punishment,” in which total control is achieved by a collective fear of retribution. In this kind of community punishment is seen as inevitable even if it is often invisible. Foucault notes that from the eighteenth century to the nineteenth the nature of punishment changed significantly, from being a public spectacle involving torture and execution to being an invisible force (*Discipline* 7–9). Whereas the public spectacle had the effect of making the sovereign’s power manifest to the people, invisible punishment made manifest the “continuously distributed effects of public power” (*Discipline* 81). It thus became the inevitability of punishment that deterred transgressors. This pervasive fear is evident in the society of 1984, where Winston is convinced that no matter what he does or does not do, he will eventually be arrested by the Thought Police and then tortured and executed. In Lowry’s novel, too, the culture of punishment has taken hold in the minds of the citizens, and their acquiescence to this strict code of discipline depends in large part on this pervasive fear.

In such societies, everyone is a potential transgressor, for it is nearly impossible not to transgress against some rule. Foucault comments on this pernicious aspect of the new regime: “[I]f necessary, everything might serve to punish the slightest thing; each subject finds himself caught in a punishable, punishing universality” (*Discipline* 178). In 1984 Winston worries that even a particular facial expression might be taken the wrong way: “Your worst enemy, he reflected, was your own nervous system. At any moment the tension inside you was liable to translate itself into some visible symptom” (56). In Lowry’s novel,

"crimes" more often have the status of transgressions or even errors. The boy Fritz, for example, has been chastised often, but always for small infractions: "shoes on the wrong feet, schoolwork misplaced, failure to study adequately for a quiz" (45). These transgressions, however, are considered serious enough to warrant punishment, for they "[infringe] on the community's sense of order and success" (45-46). A criminal in this society, then, is anyone who cannot be completely integrated into the power structures of the community.

In the service of this intricate network of power structures depicted in *The Giver*, various kinds of punishment are employed. The most visible is the discipline wand, "a thin, flexible weapon" (54) used to strike the hands or legs. Apparently, it is used exclusively on children and the elderly. Another frequently mentioned method of punishment is "chastisement," which seems to involve reprimands of varying degrees. During the Ceremony at which twelve-year-olds receive their life assignments, Jonas notices that Asher is fidgeting and receives "silent chastisement" (53) from the group leader, an action that is described as "a motion to sit still and face forward" (53).

A much more serious kind of punishment is "release," a term used to refer variously to both euthanasia and execution. Release is not thought of as a punishment if it is employed as euthanasia. When an underweight baby is released, for example, the occasion is considered sad, as it implies a failure on the part of the nurturers. When an elderly person is released, the occasion is considered a time to celebrate the culmination of a life fully led. If employed as a means of execution, however, release is considered a "terrible punishment" (2), as was the case with the errant pilot and the father of one of Jonas's classmates. This kind of release is never mentioned because "the disgrace [is] unspeakable" (9).

In addition to these palpable punishments, a more subtle method of discipline in this community is shame. Shame is what gives force to a legend that circulates among the children, which tells of an eleven-year-old who did not complete his volunteer hours in time for the annual Ceremony of Twelve and who was thus forced to complete an additional month of volunteer work and then receive his assignment in private. This incident is said to be "a disgrace that had clouded his entire future" (28). In this society shame serves as a highly effective form of self-punishment and as such prods individuals to exercise control over themselves.

Resistance

Foucault argues that in any given society power structures are inevitable, but he also acknowledges that resistance is possible, and not only possible but necessary. In fact, power and resistance inform one another and depend upon one another for their continued existence ("The Subject and Power" 140). "It would not be possible," Foucault writes, "for power relations to exist without points of insubordination that, by definition, are means of escape" (143).

Although Foucault acknowledges the role of power in both subordinating and producing the subject, and the necessity of resistance in power relations, he unfortunately does not explore the concepts of agency and resistance in much detail (Butler 2; Bartkowski 46). To explore these concepts more fully, we need to turn to feminist theory. Frances Bartkowski explains that "[l]iberation is not a vision of the end of power . . . it is an attempt to renegotiate the terms of power-knowledge-pleasure, as in the discourse of contemporary feminism" (46). Such an attempt introduces "resistance" as an additional term into the "power-knowledge-pleasure" triad (44). Similarly, Judith Butler, following after Foucault, describes the effect of power in defining the subject and argues that power is also assumed by the subject in such a way that "the power assumed may at once retain and resist that subordination" (13). The result is that the subject gains agency in (potentially) "opposing and transforming the social terms by which it is spawned" (29). Likewise, Marilyn French describes two kinds of power: "power-over," which refers to the domination of others, and "power-to," which refers to a kind of freedom based on the exercise of agency (505).

Varying degrees of agency and resistance are evident in the dystopian novels discussed in this essay. In examining the dynamics of resistance, it is useful to consider the four tenets shared by Foucault and feminism: (1) the body is the site of power, (2) power operates locally as well as at the level of the state, (3) discourse produces power, and (4) Western discourse has been dominated by patriarchal values (Diamond and Quinby x). If the body is a site acted upon by the power structures of the community, it can also be used by the individual as a means of undermining those power structures. Destroying the body is the ultimate way for the individual to undermine society's ability to exert control over the body. John Savage in *Brave New World* commits suicide rather than acquiescing to the power structures of the society

into which he has been transplanted. Similarly, Jonas's predecessor—the Giver's daughter—refused to accept the role thrust upon her and instead applied for release after only five weeks of training.

If power operates locally as well as globally, so does resistance to power. In the society of Lowry's novel, for example, everyone breaks the rule about not learning to ride a bicycle until the age of nine. Likewise, everyone makes fun of the inordinate amount of time required for the Committee of Elders to approve a change in the rules. These local resistances to power function as a safety valve, a harmless, socially acceptable way of expressing mild frustration. Other kinds of local resistance are more significant and represent an assertion of one's humanity and individuality. In *1984*, for instance, Winston and Julia break a fundamental rule of the Party by becoming lovers. Jonas too asserts his individuality and independence when he stops taking the pills to suppress his sexual urges.

The idea that discourse produces power is both exemplified and undermined by various characters in these novels. Winston engages in a discursive act related to self-definition and preservation when he begins keeping a diary. In a society where history is easily and constantly rewritten, he knows that this is his only means of achieving any kind of continuity. In *The Giver*, Asher's persistent trouble with using language indicates perhaps a subconscious form of resistance on his part. For a while, we are told, Asher remained silent rather than risk the punishment that came with the incorrect use of language. Even as an adolescent, he still confuses certain words, saying at one point that he lacks "boyishness" when he means "buoyancy" in describing why he has difficulty learning to swim (47–48).

Finally, the idea that Western society is dominated by patriarchal values is illustrated in the novels by acts of resistance against such values. In *Brave New World* the figure of Henry Ford epitomizes this overly mechanized society in which conception, gestation, birth, and child-rearing are accomplished through an assembly-line method. John Savage, the outsider who has a biological mother, resists this deterministic kind of society when he insists on sitting by his mother's hospital bed when she is dying. In *1984* "Big Brother" is the name given to the ubiquitous image of the paternal figure who symbolizes this brutal totalitarian society. Winston's hatred of Big Brother and the hope he places in rumors of other pockets of resistance represent his antagonism toward the patriarchal values embodied in this dystopia.

In *The Giver* various incidents suggest an undermining of patriarchal values. Jonas's mother, for instance, who has the traditionally patriarchal position of judge, expresses her frustration at having to punish a repeat offender. She chafes against the strict rules that dictate release for anyone who commits a third offense. Jonas's father, who has the traditionally matriarchal position of nurturer, expresses sadness that the baby Gabriel may have to be released because he is underweight and fussy. These feelings cause him to bend the rules and bring the baby home at night for extra nurturing, even though such an arrangement is highly unusual. In their actions, both of Jonas's parents demonstrate resistance to the rigid patriarchal values that permeate their community.

It is Jonas, however, who displays the most subversive acts of resistance. Over the course of a year of training, he grows in awareness and develops a strong sense of individuality. At first, he begins to see colors, then begins to resent the fact that the ability to detect colors has been eradicated from this community. He comes to embrace the idea of choice and then chafes at the notion of an assigned role. With the Giver's help, Jonas comes to recognize the paralyzing power structures of his community, and, at great personal risk, he resists them.

Rupture

How, then, are we to interpret Jonas's ultimate act of resistance? Foucault writes of the possibility of resistance leading to a "radical rupture" within a particular society:

. . . the points, knots, or focuses of resistance are spread over time and space at varying densities, at times mobilizing groups or individuals in a definitive way, inflaming certain points of the body, certain moments in life, certain types of behavior. (*History* 96)

Such a rupture does not occur in *1984* or *Brave New World*. In the former, Winston is brainwashed so effectively that he loses his individuality and thus his ability to resist the totalizing power structures of his society: "He had won the victory over himself. He loved Big Brother" (266). In the latter, John Savage does resist up to the end, but, like the Giver's daughter, he pays a high price: his ultimate act of resistance is to destroy himself. His friends, Bernard Marx and Helmholtz Watson, who have always been outsiders in this society, finally are banished to an island of "misfits," somewhat enviously described by Mustapha Mond

as “the most interesting set of men and women to be found anywhere in the world . . . people who, for one reason or another, have got too self-consciously individual to fit into community-life” (227). However, this does not represent a rupture in society proper; it represents instead a very effective means of isolating and removing those elements in society that might cause such a rupture.

In contrast, *The Giver* at least provides for the possibility of a radical rupture in the social fabric of this community. In order to understand the significance of both Jonas’s escape and the ambiguous ending, we must first consider the Receiver of Memory’s role in this community. Jonas is chosen to be the new Receiver because of his intelligence, integrity, courage, ability to achieve wisdom, and “Capacity to See Beyond” (62–63). To be selected as the Receiver-in-Training is considered a great honor, but it also involves great pain. At first Jonas’s training consists of receiving pleasurable memories, such as the “breathless glee” of sledding (82). However, the training becomes increasingly painful as it progresses, almost as if Jonas is being punished although he has done nothing wrong. He is, for example, given another memory of sledding, in which he has an accident and breaks his leg. This time it feels “as if a hatchet lay lodged in his leg, slicing through each nerve with a hot blade” (109). During sessions with the Giver, Jonas receives memories, often painful ones, by taking off his tunic and allowing the Giver to place his hands on his bare back, traditionally the locus for the infliction of punishment. Clearly, the transfer of pain is not a duty the Giver relishes; when he transmits an agonizing memory of war, for example, he “looked away, as if he could not bear to see what he had done to Jonas” (120). He acknowledges that he had similar feelings when he attempted to train his daughter as the new Receiver ten years earlier: “It broke my heart, Jonas, to transfer pain to her. But it was my job. It was what I had to do, the way I’ve had to do it to you” (141).

The Receiver’s role in this community is essentially that of the scapegoat, bearing the painful memories so that other members of the community do not have to (Levy 53–54). The Giver, in training his successor, becomes “society’s ordained persecutor of the new scapegoat” (Levy 55). Jonas’s name recalls that of Jonah, a scapegoat of the Old Testament (Levy 54). The allusion is especially apt, for Jonah initially fled from his role as prophet, just as Jonas is reluctant to accept the role dictated to him. In contrast to Jonah, however, who eventually accepted his calling as prophet, Jonas ultimately renounces his assigned role, choosing instead to risk his life by trying to escape.

The Receiver's role as scapegoat may also be understood in terms of Foucault's conceptualization of the criminal's role in the new regime:

In the old system, the body of the condemned man became the king's property, on which the sovereign left his mark and brought down the effects of his power. Now he will be rather the property of society, the object of a collective and useful appropriation. (*Discipline* 109)

The society depicted in Lowry's novel is the quintessential utilitarian society, in which even memories and pain can be compartmentalized and relegated to a specific person. In the assignment forced upon Jonas, honor and punishment are conflated, with the role exemplifying the community's ability to appropriate his body, mind, and soul. Such an appropriation serves to preserve the strict division of labor, rigid system of discipline, and intricate network of power structures. The Giver hints at this function of the role when he says that, without a Receiver, the community "will be thrown into chaos. They'll destroy themselves" (156).

Nevertheless, Jonas decides to break away from this totalitarian society in an act that suggests both defiance and a desire to assert his individuality. In that sense, his may be considered an especially (although not exclusively) American response. As Thomas Hine explains in his book on American adolescence:

There has probably never been a culture in which the quest for an individual identity has been as important, and thus as fraught with problems, as that of the United States. . . . Rarely do we think that people are, or ought to be, born into a particular role in life, though that has probably been the norm in most times and places. Nor do we view a role in society as being a gift that its holder can pass on to a protégé. (41)

Nor, I would add, do we think that a role should be forced upon an individual. Jonas's act of resistance, then, represents a (perhaps symbolic) victory of the subject's power over the power structures of society.

The Giver does, however, display two characteristics that are typical of socializing young adult novels. One is a confrontation with death that leads to a "tragic loss of innocence" (Trites 118–21). The pivotal scene for Jonas occurs when he witnesses his father euthanize a baby. Jonas's reaction is immediate and intense: "[He] felt a ripping sensation inside himself, the feeling of terrible pain clawing its way forward

to emerge in a cry" (151). This confrontation with death serves as the catalyst to help Jonas recognize the true nature of the power structures on which his community is based, and thus make the decision to escape.

Many young adult novels also depict the strong influence of an adult whose wisdom serves as a guide to the adolescent protagonist (Trites 80). The Giver plays that role for Jonas, ironically helping him through his training to recognize the limitations of the community in which he lives and the oppressiveness of the role that has been thrust upon him. Moreover, the Giver helps Jonas to see that his leaving may actually help the community. Saying that Jonas has helped him to realize "that things must change" (155), the Giver explains that, if Jonas escapes, the memories that have been transferred to him will return to the community and the people will have to bear the burden of those memories themselves: "I think that they can, and that they will acquire some wisdom" (156).

It is possible, then, that Jonas, in rejecting his assigned role, will actually play a more valuable role for the community. René Girard explains that in myth the scapegoat is often depicted as the person who not only causes a crisis in the community, but also is able to bring the crisis to an end: "The transgressor restores and even establishes the order he has somehow transgressed in anticipation" (42). Jonas's act of resistance may help to restore the old order as described by the Giver: ". . . the memories tell us that [the community's inability to feel] has not always been. People felt things once" (154). When Jonas leaves, the Giver will stay behind to help the community cope with the memories—and pain—that they will experience for the first time. The reader does not know what ultimately happens to the community or, for that matter, what happens to Jonas and Gabriel, for the novel eschews closure and resists easy interpretation.

In her discussion of *The Giver*, Patty Campbell alludes to the role of agency and resistance in the novel when she says that there are basically three ways to end a story about a dystopian society: "The protagonist escapes as society collapses; the protagonist escapes with the intention of returning with the seeds of change; or the protagonist escapes, but it turns out to be an illusion. Lowry opts for elements of all three" (719).

Clearly, Lowry endorses the possibility of a proactive rather than a merely reactive subject. In her Newbery Medal acceptance speech, she says that children who have written to her over the years have

offered various interpretations of the ending. One child suggested that Jonas and Gabriel travel in a circle and at the end they return to their own community, which has now accepted memory and feeling. Another felt that Jonas and Gabriel escaped to a different community, while yet another believed that they made it to Elsewhere, a mythical place much like heaven (Lowry, "Newbery Medal Acceptance" 420–21). Lowry, however, makes it clear that there is no single correct interpretation of the ending; instead, she explains, "There's a right one for each of us, and it depends on our own beliefs, our own hopes" (420).¹

Foucault might argue that, regardless of where Jonas and Gabriel end up, they have not escaped, and indeed cannot escape, society's power structures. "Power," he explains, "is everywhere; not because it embraces everything but because it comes from everywhere" (*History* 93). Lowry's novel, through its portrayal of a dystopian community, both depicts and critiques these power structures that permeate society. Whether or not Jonas ultimately survives, it is clear that in leaving the community, he escapes the imposition of a role of honor and embraces the role of the criminal, as defined by this community. He himself recognizes this aspect of his new role as he reflects on his actions: "It was not safe to spend time looking back. He thought of the rules he had broken so far: enough that if he were caught, now, he would be condemned" (165).

Jonas's achievement is that he breaks free of stultifying boundaries, and in so doing accomplishes a remarkably courageous thing: he refuses to be a "docile body" and instead resists—and perhaps ultimately transforms—the power structures and disciplinary techniques embedded in this culture of punishment. The novel itself both resists and fulfills the role of the typical adolescent novel, as described by Trites, namely to integrate adolescents into the power structures of society. Toward that end, the novel shows that "the social power that constructs [adolescents] bestows upon them a power from which they generate their own sense of subjectivity" (Trites 7). We do not know what happens to the community after Jonas leaves. In helping Jonas plan his escape, the Giver suggests that by leaving Jonas may actually help the community achieve redemption and renewal. But it seems just as likely that his leaving will have a catastrophic impact, throwing the community into chaos. It is also quite possible that the community will absorb the loss just as it did with the loss of the previous Receiver-in-Training and will continue to perpetuate the power struc-

tures that Jonas has resisted so valiantly. We also do not know what happens to Jonas and Gabriel, although the final images of the novel are hopeful if inconclusive. In the final scene Jonas and Gabriel are sledding downhill toward a community where lighted trees can be seen through the windows. Jonas seems to know instinctively that these are "places where families created and kept memories, where they celebrated love" (179). He hears people singing too, and he thinks he hears music coming "across vast distances of space and time, from the place he had left" (180). These images suggest not only that he has reached a place of "warmth and light" (179), but also that the community he left behind has perhaps achieved some sort of renewal. The last sentence of the novel, however, refuses to provide closure and resists a facile interpretation: "Perhaps it was only an echo" (180).

Whatever destination Jonas has reached, it seems safe to say that it is a place of family and community: in other words, a place that embodies the ideals we hold about our own society. The novel ultimately suggests that, while Jonas has resisted and escaped the power structures of his own dystopian community, he is moving toward integration into the power structures of another kind of community, one more hopeful and more positive, but constituted by power structures nonetheless. The novel thus shows that resistance to power structures is possible and even productive. Lowry invokes this notion again in her acceptance speech by paying tribute to another kind of power, the power of reading: "[E]ach time a child opens a book, he pushes open the gate that separates him from Elsewhere. It gives him choices. It gives him freedom. Those are magnificent, wonderfully unsafe things" (422). The metaphor is apt, for reading is both a personal and a profoundly social activity. *The Giver* is ultimately a socializing novel in the sense that, through reading it, adolescents experience vicariously what Trites describes as their "capacity to disturb the universe" (141), while simultaneously being reintegrated into the power structures of that universe in which they will enact their own power.

Note

¹On her website and elsewhere, Lowry has said that Jonas will appear in *Messenger*, the third book in the trilogy that includes *The Giver* and *Gathering Blue*. *Messenger* is due to be published in the spring of 2004 (Lowry, "Frequently Asked Questions").

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